

Herculaneum), in whose catastrophe that writer lost his life.

I am,

S I R,

Your most obedient,  
humble servant,

London, Feb. 3, 1761.

J. Nixon.

XXIV. *A Description of the Cepphus: In a Letter from D. Lysons, M. D. to Robert More, Esq; F. R. S.*

S I R,

All-souls Coll. Oct. 17, 1760.

Read April 16,  
1761.

**T**O save you the trouble of taking an account of the bird I sent you, I have now taken the liberty to trouble you with the inclosed description, which is pretty near, though, perhaps, not quite exact. Ray, in Wiltoughby's ornithology, says, this bird is yet to us unknown; and takes his description of it from Aldrovandus, who says, it was not described by any author before his time, that he knows of.

The bird before us is, I think, the cepphus of Aldrovandus, though it does not agree in all points: perhaps, that he saw, might be a male, this a female. In his, the sides of the mandibles were of a dusky red, in this not. The eyes of his were partly red,  
which

which I did not observe in this. Round the eyes in his was a whitish circle, in this a variegated semi-circle. The legs and shanks in his greenish, in this of a dilute blue. The feet, and membranes connecting the toes, in his were dusky, in this partly black.

Some authors have supposed the cepphus of the antients to be the fulica, or coot. This Aldrovandus confutes, by many arguments, one of which is sufficient. He quotes a passage from Varrinus, where the cepphus of Aristotle is mentioned as a sea bird, and having the claws connected by a membrane, which the coot has not; neither is the coot a sea bird, being often found, in great numbers, upon lakes and standing waters.

Aldrovandus reckons his cepphus as a species of the larus; which is denied by Pierius Valerianus, upon the strength of an argument, which, I think, tends strongly to prove it. "Cepphus enim, inquit, " *ad cibum quæcunque vescatur, ut etiam maritima* " *sit spuma contentus; larus vero inter voracissimas* " *numeratur, omnivorumque animal esse fertur.*" The cepphus is said to be a very active bird, always flying about in quest of its prey, which is bits of flesh, or fish, left by other fish of the voracious kind, or, in short, any kind of food it meets with swimming upon the surface of the water. Now, such substances as swim upon the surface of the water are not so likely to be met with any where, as amongst the scum and froth of the sea, driven together by the wind. This bird therefore dipping so frequently into the spume of the sea, is probably for the food swimming amongst it, rather than to feed upon the

spume itself. After this character given of the omnivorous cepphus, it is something extraordinary, that Valerianus should refuse ranging it in the class of lari, because it was not sufficiently voracious.

Another reason, why this bird may be supposed to be the true cepphus, is the simple manner, in which it was taken. In a field adjoining to Oxford, called the Parks, was some radish, or some such sort of seed, covered with old nets, to keep off the small birds. In these nets was the bird entangled, and taken. Its being so far in land was possibly occasioned by the late stormy weather.

#### A Description of Aldrovandus's Cepphus.

It weighed eleven ounces. Its measure was, from the tip of the bill to the end of the tail, 15 inches. From the tip of one wing to the tip of the other, when extended, 39 inches. Round the body, where the wings are set on, 11 inches. Round the body, where the legs are set on, 8 inches and an half. From the angle of the mouth to the point of the beak, an inch and three quarters.

The anterior part of the upper mandible is of a lead colour, and rough, resembling horn in appearance. The point of the bill is black, crooked at the end, smooth, and of a harder substance than the other part. The inferior mandible is, in its anterior part, of a lead colour, the point black, but all smooth. Where the two sides of the lower chap meet in an acute angle underneath, is a small prominence, or knob. Its nostril extends almost the length of the beak, the aperture being widest towards the point; as it approaches the head, it is almost closed up.

Its neck is short; its body in shape much like a wild duck. The throat, neck, breast, and belly, are of a very dusky colour, variegated with white, yellow, or brown, intermixed; under the throat, about the eyes, upon the breast and belly, being more variegated than between the throat and breast. Below the vent, the feathers under the tail are marked with bright yellow transverse lines.

In the wing are twenty-eight black quill feathers, the ten outermost of which are tipped with brown; the feathers incumbent upon the quill feathers are also tipped with brown; so that, upon the wing extended, four beautiful transverse lines appear. The superior part of the wing, and the short feathers under the wing, are beautifully variegated with a bright brown or yellow; on the under side, the quill feathers are of a dusky colour, and shining, the five outermost being partly white.

The head is small and slender, of a dark colour, variegated with light brown, as is the upper part of the neck. The lower part of the neck, and the back, are of a dark dusky colour.

The tail has twelve feathers, the shortest of which are 4 inches, and the middle, which are the longest, not above 4 and an half. The ends of them all are black; but part of them towards the rump, are white about one fourth of their length. Upon the tail, on each side, are a few feathers incumbent, marked with transverse bright brown lines.

From the joint between the leg and thigh to the end of the longest claw, is 3 inches. The legs are of a bluish lead colour. The back claw is small, and black; the other three claws are connected by a membrane,

membrane, the extremity of which is black; its anterior part white, or lightly tinged with yellow; the innermost claw is of the same lead colour with the leg, to the last joint; the middle claw only to the first joint; and the outer claw has a very little lead colour upon it, but not to the first joint. The extremities of all the claws are black. The nails, which are small, are all black. The middle nail has a keen broad edge on its anterior side.

After so long an account of this bird, as I have troubled you with, perhaps you may be ready to conclude, with the same line, that Aldrovandus ends his observations upon the cephus,

*Parturiunt montes, nascitur ridiculus mus.*

But as my intention is good, I hope that will be accepted as an excuse, for the great pains I have put you to in reading so long a letter; and that I may be permitted to subscribe myself,

S I R,

Your most obedient

humble servant,

D. Lysons.